

Hero Rufus Youngblood gets the Secret Service brush-off

"It was as brave an act as I have ever seen," writes Lyndon Johnson in his memoirs. Johnson's recollection of Secret Service Agent Rufus Youngblood is understandably vivid: in 1963 in Dallas, Youngblood threw the then Vice-President to the floor of his limousine, shielding him with his own body. Youngblood was cited for bravery and elevated to chief of the White House detail, the first of three promotions during the Johnson presidency.

This year, at only 47, Youngblood abruptly retired.

"I could have sat there, fat, dumb and happy," Youngblood says now, "taking up space and wasting the taxpayer's money. Life is too short to stay where you're not wanted."

From the first days of the Nixon administration, Youngblood found himself being shoved aside.

He was moved out of his White House office and given "new" quarters across the street. People neglected to tell him of meetings. Memos came by his office for signature, since he was still assistant director of protective forces, but only after the important decisions had been made. Since 1964, Youngblood had had the privileges of the exclusive White House staff mess, but after only a few weeks of the Nixon administration, Youngblood's mess privileges were abruptly withdrawn.

Youngblood is sure President Nixon knew nothing of these petty harassments. "He's got more important things to do," says Youngblood. "But it's those second- or third-string quarterbacks who come in and say, 'Let's get rid of this guy—he was there with L.B.J.' " Ironically, Youngblood's first Secret Service assignment

was on the Harry Truman detail, and he later spent more than six years protecting President Eisenhower. He is still a personal friend of Mrs. Eisenhower.

Since his retirement, Youngblood has been mentioned as a possible police chief in his home town of Atlanta. Inevitably, people have urged him to write a book about his Secret Service career. "It would be a very boring book," Youngblood says, "no scandal, no exposé, no gossip." Nor does he have anything new to say on the Kennedy assassination. "You spend 20 hard years of giving your best," he says, with some bitterness. "And you're remembered for the 20 seconds when everything went wrong."

Still, the White House has already taken pains to discredit any Youngblood book. Asked whether politics had played a part in Youngblood's retirement, Press Secretary Ron Ziegler sniffed, "If you wanted to sell a book, wouldn't you say something like that?"

"I can't play his game," responds Youngblood. "I'd just come

out second best. Making statements to the press is Ron Ziegler's business. Anyway, he probably has as much chance to get to heaven as I do."

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Youngblood on the alert with L.B.J.



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